

## **Transforming Michigan's Adult Learning Infrastructure**

**A report to the Council for Labor and Economic Growth from  
the CLEG Low-Wage Worker Advancement Committee's  
Adult Learning Work Group**

**September 9, 2008**

## 1. Forward

For the past six months, the State of Michigan's Low-Wage Worker Advancement Strategy Committee of the Council for Labor & Economic Growth has been working through its Adult Learning Work Group to examine and provide recommendations for transformation of Michigan's approach to basic skills development to better meet the needs of adult learners, employers, and the state in an ever-changing economy.

The Adult Learning Work Group includes adult learning practitioners from around the state, representing community colleges, literacy councils, adult basic education programs, Michigan Works! Agencies, community-based organizations and four state departments. Its aim is to recommend comprehensive policy reforms which will substantially re-imagine and re-design the adult learning infrastructure in Michigan.

The Work Group has gathered data about the current strategies and resources devoted to basic skill development; researched the current and projected need; learned about promising practices for system redesign; and engaged a full range of stakeholders in conversations about improving adult learning opportunities and supporting Michigan's adult learners, including more than 200 attendees at seven regional forums around the state. The results of these efforts are captured in this report.

The Work Group deliberately has used the term “adult learning” to describe its area of focus. The scale of need for basic skills development is tremendous; it goes well beyond the scope and capacity of any individual program or funding silo.

The feedback received during the regional forums was incredibly energizing, and revealed widespread understanding by practitioners that Michigan learners live in a very different economy and context today than we did when programs were originally created. We are excited by the innovation we already see in pockets around the state, and by the willingness of many dedicated educators to come together in creating diverse new solutions that better fit the needs we face today and tomorrow. The transformative work that is underway carries tremendous potential.

We are in this together. If people in Michigan are not getting the education they need—for whatever reason—all of us are affected. We have some tough work ahead of us and we ask you to continue to remain engaged in efforts to reinvent adult learning in our state. Together, we will move forward in building a better future for Michigan's people.

## 2. Executive Summary

Life in Michigan, and indeed the world, is all about transitions: changes in the local, national, and global economies that demand transitions of our workers. Unfortunately, too many of our workers are unprepared for the adjustments they are being required to make.

Michigan's economy is transforming to a place where new skills, knowledge, and credentials, especially post-secondary education, are required for success, from one where families had reason to believe that a high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate would lead to a family-sustaining job. Michigan employers have had to respond to these changes in recent years and continue to do so today. Michigan's adult learning system has been slower to respond and adjust. While we have been going through this transformation to a global economy, over the past 20 years, the State of Michigan dramatically shifted focus away from basic adult education programs, resulting in substantially fewer programs serving fewer adults, despite greater need than ever.

Michigan must prepare workers for new opportunities and the numbers in need of assistance are startling.

- **One in three working-age Michigan adults — 1.7 million people — lack the basic skills or credentials to attain family-sustaining jobs and contribute to the state's economy.<sup>1</sup>**
- **Of these adults, 692,000 do not have a GED or high-school diploma.<sup>2</sup>**
- **44 percent of Michigan's adults have very minimal literacy skills, no greater than those necessary to perform simple and everyday activities.<sup>3</sup>**
- **Nearly 1.15 million working adults in Michigan who have earned a GED or high-school diploma, but have not entered post-secondary education, are earning at or below the State's median wage of \$15.45 per hour.<sup>4</sup>**
- **According to community colleges around the state, at least 60 percent of students entering these institutions require remediation prior to engaging in post-secondary education.<sup>5</sup> Basic skills development is a major barrier for many who are seeking post-secondary credentials.**
- **Michigan is ranked 44th in terms of enrollment in state administered adult basic education programs per 1,000 adults with less than a high-school diploma.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2006 *Public Use Microdata Samples* [Data File]. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2006 *Michigan Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 and Over* [Data File]. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)

<sup>3</sup> Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS). 2007. *Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Why Adult Education and Skills Training Matters for Michigan's Future*.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Michigan Community College Association.

<sup>6</sup> The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) (2008) *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data*.

- **In part because of limited basic skills, 28 percent of working poor families (24,229 families) have a parent without a high-school diploma and 11 percent of working poor families (9,518 families) have a parent who speaks English less than “very well”.<sup>7</sup>**

The scale of the needed transformation is massive and must occur immediately. We are in the midst of a unique moment when multiple constituencies and stakeholders are supportive of extensive transformation. We must harness this current synergy and interest in adult learning policy and practice to put Michigan on the road to being a national leader in promoting and providing opportunities for lifelong learning, including the development of solid basic skills.

### **STRATEGIC INTENT**

**One out of three Michigan workers lacks the basic skills or credentials to attain family-sustaining jobs and contribute to the state’s economy<sup>8</sup>. If we do not address this crisis, our state’s ability to prosper in the future will be severely hampered. It is imperative to transform Michigan’s adult learning infrastructure to connect these adults to continuing education, hard and soft skills, and careers in our ever-changing economy.**

In support of this strategic intent, Michigan’s adult learning programs and policies must reflect the values and demands of our changing economy, defined below, which together represent the vital sweeping reinvention of our adult learning infrastructure and its potential impact.

### **COLLABORATION**

Michigan’s policies and programs must:

- Synergistically unite the core competencies and capacities of various stakeholders to achieve a common vision of success for adult learners and employers.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Michigan’s policies and programs must:

- Comprehensively promote shared responsibility for common outcomes across the adult learning infrastructure.
- Sufficiently invest in the strategies necessary to collect data on program performance.
- Use data to inform decisions about future policies and programs.

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<sup>7</sup> Michigan League for Human Services. *Labor Day Report*. 2008. Referencing Population Reference Bureau analysis of American Community Survey data, as requested by the Working Poor Families Project.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, op. cit.

## **RESPONSIVENESS**

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Recognize that earning a high-school diploma is no longer sufficient for adult learners and employers; promote post-secondary education as the new standard for adult learners, understanding that attaining a high-school diploma or GED is an important milestone along the path of lifelong learning.
- Eagerly welcome learners at all levels with open doors and clear learning pathways.
- Seamlessly integrate program pathways and assist with navigation to move learners toward their goals.
- Develop programs that meet the needs of adult learners with non-traditional adult learning approaches, including accelerated curricula, flexible scheduling, contextualized remediation, and year-round programming.
- Inclusively engage employers as partners in developing adult learning standards and approaches.
- Ensure adult learners have access to opportunities, both by making programs affordable and available to learners, as well as providing programs that meet learners where they are.

## **AGILITY**

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Rapidly respond to the needs of learners, employers, and communities.
- Proactively identify new opportunities to meet diverse needs.
- Creatively design and deliver innovative programs that equip Michigan to be successful in emerging markets.

## **CONTEXTUALIZATION**

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Inventively develop learners' basic skills in the context of practical applications in the real world so they quickly grasp the relevance of the skills and remain engaged in programs until they earn needed credentials.
- Creatively develop basic skills in the context of occupational skills necessary for success at work.

## **ENTREPRENEURISM**

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Continuously employ innovative thinking and approaches in program delivery that increase the range of customers served by programs.
- Resourcefully leverage various assets to support new approaches and outcomes for learners, employers, and the state.
- Foster entrepreneurial thinking and process so learners enter the workplace or start their own businesses equipped to sustain the entrepreneurial spirit that drives the innovation of new products, processes, and job creation.

## ALIGNMENT

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Intentionally develop articulation agreements and standardized pathways among various institutions to ensure adult learners can participate in lifelong learning knowing that their academic work will be recognized across various institutions.
- Strategically align funding to support a comprehensive strategy and approaches that meet the needs of adult learners, employers, and the state.

The impact of a transformed adult learning infrastructure on workers, employers, and our state will be profound and widespread. This impact can include:

- **Higher personal incomes**  
Over a lifetime, increased education for Michigan's workers offers astounding financial benefits for our state. If those adults in Michigan with less than a high-school diploma, with a high-school diploma, and with some college were to earn an Associate's Degree, their cumulative lifetime earnings would increase by \$1.76 trillion.<sup>9</sup>
- **Higher rates of citizenship and civic engagement**  
There is a strong correlation between levels of citizenship and civic engagement and levels of educational attainment. For example, 39.5 percent of registered voters with less than a high-school diploma voted in the 2004 Presidential elections, as compared to 68.9 percent of registered voters with at least some college or an Associate's Degree.<sup>10</sup>
- **Higher levels of educational achievement for future generations**  
Family income is a major predictor for whether a student will be lost in the educational pipeline. The Education Commission of the States estimates that while the rate of ninth graders entering college right after high school is around 39.5 percent, it is only 23.3 percent for Michigan's low-income students.<sup>11</sup>
- **Higher levels of fiscal contribution**  
If the approximately 692,000 working-age adults we have identified as not having a high-school diploma were to earn a diploma or GED, their annual net fiscal contribution would increase by \$4.97 billion. If they went on to college, their annual net fiscal contribution would increase by another \$3.13 billion. Clearly, increased investment in educational achievement yields financial benefits for the state and the nation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) (2008) *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data*; and U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> US Census Bureau. *Voting and Registration in the Election of 2004*. 2006. Retrieved on Aug. 20, 2008 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> MLHS, op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> National Commission on Adult Literacy. *Reach Higher America: Overcoming Crisis in the US Workforce*. 2008.

- **Higher rates of job creation and economic growth**

Michigan will be able to attract employers who strongly value a workforce that has the skills, knowledge, and credentials required to meet their needs. A skilled workforce attracts higher-end employers and provides the vital human capital necessary for existing employers to expand more rapidly. When we meet the expansion of opportunities in the new economy with an equal or greater increase in the number of workers who have the appropriate training for these occupations and careers, we can expect job creation and economic growth.

Working together we can aim Michigan toward being a leader in lifelong learning and economic prosperity. We can harness the potential of the transitions taking place around us to improve our state's global competitiveness, employers' prosperity, and workers' abilities to succeed in the ever-changing economy.

### 3. The Time for Change is Now

Life in Michigan, and indeed the world, is all about transitions: changes in the local, national, and global economies that demand transitions of our workers. Unfortunately, too many of our workers are unprepared for the adjustments they are being required to make.

Michigan's economy is transforming to a place where new skills, knowledge, and credentials, especially post-secondary education, are required for success, from one where families had reason to believe that a high-school diploma or general educational development (GED) certificate would lead to a family-sustaining job. Michigan employers have had to respond to these changes in recent years and continue to do so today. Michigan's adult learning system has been slower to respond and adjust. While we have been going through this transformation to a global economy, over the past 20 years, the State of Michigan dramatically shifted focus away from basic adult education programs, resulting in substantially fewer programs serving fewer adults, despite greater need than ever.

**Evidence suggests that knowledge-based industries are now the major source of employment growth in good-paying jobs. And they are the most powerful engine fueling overall economic growth.<sup>13</sup>**

These emerging industries offer new opportunities, but even with the highest unemployment rate in the nation, Michigan employers still have job vacancies because too many workers lack the skills required in the new global economy. Jobs in knowledge-based industries require significant postsecondary training or a bachelor's degree. **In fact, the number of jobs in Michigan requiring a post-secondary degree is expected to continue to rise in the future. And yet, of Michigan's 5 million working-age adults (18-64), nearly two-thirds have not yet completed an Associate's degree or higher.<sup>14</sup>** One recent study projected that by 2012, the state will have a shortage of 334,000 skilled workers.<sup>15</sup>

The growth of middle-skill jobs, those jobs requiring more than a high-school diploma but less than a four-year degree, is a key element of the knowledge-based economy. **Middle-skill jobs make up 51 percent of Michigan jobs, with this proportion expected to increase.<sup>16</sup>** However, the expansion of these jobs is outpacing increases in the number of workers who have the appropriate training for these careers. When key industries in Michigan are unable to find enough sufficiently trained workers to fill these jobs, job creation and economic growth are compromised.

For Michigan to be successful in this changing economic climate, we must work to enhance the skills and abilities of our workers and help them attain the knowledge that will prepare them to access these emerging markets. *No Worker Left Behind* is equipping Michigan workers with the right sets of skills and credentials to seize new opportunities, by offering transitioning workers

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<sup>13</sup> Skills2Compete (n.d.) *Michigan's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from [www.skills2compete.org](http://www.skills2compete.org)

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2006 Michigan Age by Educational Attainment [Data File]. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs)

<sup>15</sup> Michigan League for Human Services. *Michigan's Weak Link: Unemployment, the Skills Gap, and the Declining Support for Adult Education*. April 2005.

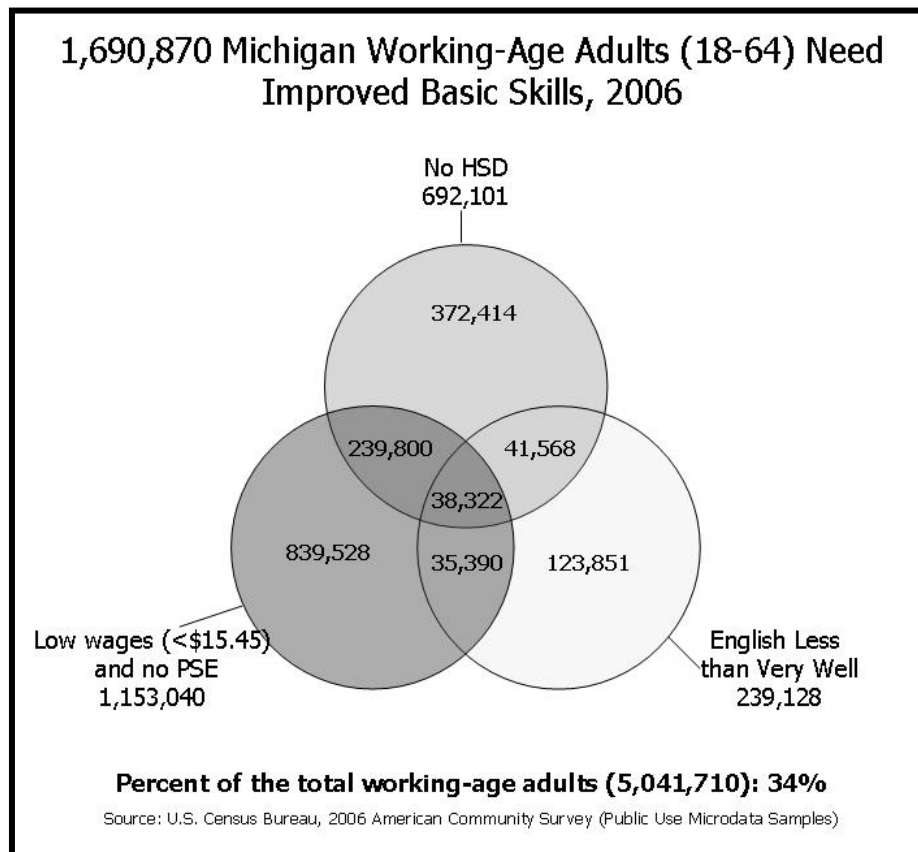
<sup>16</sup> Skills2Compete, op. cit.



up to two years of free tuition to help them obtain a degree or other credential in a demand occupation. However, more than one year after *No Worker Left Behind* was launched, it is clear that there are hundreds of thousands of workers who, because of a lack of sufficient basic skills and credentials, are not prepared to take advantage of *No Worker Left Behind's* post-secondary learning opportunities.

Michigan must prepare workers for these new opportunities and the numbers in need of assistance are startling.

- **One in three working-age Michigan adults — 1.7 million people — lack the basic skills or credentials to attain family-sustaining jobs and contribute to the state's economy.<sup>17</sup>**



- **Of these adults, 692,000 do not have a GED or high-school diploma.<sup>18</sup>** Once considered the end goal of education, a high-school diploma or GED is now the bare minimum a worker needs to participate in the new economy. Only 55 percent of adults without a high-school diploma or GED currently participate in the workforce.<sup>19</sup> This is a large pool of workers who are unable to engage in Michigan's economy.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2006 Michigan Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 and Over [Data File]. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, *ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> Skills2Compete, *op. cit*.

- Even for the 87 percent of adults who have a GED or high-school diploma, this credential is not a guarantee of basic skills. **44 percent of Michigan's adults have very minimal literacy skills, no greater than those necessary to perform simple, everyday activities.**<sup>20</sup> In many cases, these individuals cannot read traffic signs, use a mobile phone efficiently, fill out an employment application, read and understand a lengthy newspaper article, or calculate the total costs of purchase from an order form. In some adult learning classrooms around the state, classes comprised entirely of high-school graduates work on these basic skills as a precursor to pursuing additional education and training.
- **Nearly 1.15 million working adults in Michigan who have earned a GED or high-school diploma, but have not entered post-secondary education, are earning at or below the State's median wage of \$15.45 per hour.**<sup>21</sup> Many of those workers need stronger basic skills in order to move into higher paying employment.
- **Michigan trails behind national and global averages in terms of the percentage of adults with an Associate's Degree or higher**--35.3 percent in Michigan, 1.9 percent behind the national average, 14 percent behind the leading state of Massachusetts, and 17.5 percent behind the most educated countries.<sup>22</sup> Clearly other states are ahead of Michigan in terms of their readiness to participate in the knowledge economy with a well-skilled workforce.
- **According to community colleges around the state, at least 60 percent of students entering these institutions require remediation prior to engaging in post-secondary education.**<sup>23</sup> Basic skills development is a major barrier for many who are seeking post-secondary credentials. At a community college, students who require remediation are not yet prepared to take the college-level classes in English, reading and/or mathematics that are required to earn a post-secondary degree.

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<sup>20</sup> Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS). 2007. *Fixing the Leaky Pipeline: Why Adult Education and Skills Training Matters for Michigan's Future* with reference to U.S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics, *National Adult Literacy Survey*.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) (2008) *Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data*.

<sup>23</sup> Michigan Community College Association. 2008.

- The potential demand for lifelong learning is increasing at a staggering rate, and yet the total number of adults entering Adult Basic Education, GED, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs has fallen from a high of 88,000 in the late-90s to 32,000 at its lowest point earlier this decade. These decreases reflect the significant cut in state funding for adult education during this period (from \$80 million annually from 1997 to 2001, to \$20 million annually from 2004 to 2006).<sup>24</sup> **Michigan is ranked 44th in terms of enrollment in state administered adult basic education programs per 1,000 adults with less than a high-school diploma:** 52 in Michigan, as compared to the nationwide average of 101.7, and 240.8 in the leading state of Florida.<sup>25</sup>
- Of the 32,856 individuals that participated in adult basic education programs during the 2006-2007 program year, only 37.4 percent completed or improved their educational functioning level. The completion rate of any program level rarely exceeds 50 percent.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to recognize that the financial outcomes for these workers, their children, and our communities are grim: 13.3 percent of adults who have just a high school diploma or less are living in families with incomes below a living wage.<sup>27</sup> In part because of limited basic skills, 28 percent of working poor families (24,229 families) have a parent without a high-school diploma and 11 percent of working poor families (9,518 families) have a parent who speaks English less than “very well”.<sup>28</sup>

Over time, the gap has widened between hourly wages earned by those with less than a high-school diploma and those who have completed college. In 1973, the disparity was \$8.18 per hour (\$12.56 to \$21.00). In 2005, the disparity was \$14.14 (\$10.53 to \$24.67). It is also clear that while hourly wages for college completers have increased over this period, hourly wages for those with less than a high-school diploma have fallen.<sup>29</sup>

Continuing educational achievement also prepares workers for the middle-skill jobs that provide good wages and career paths for Michigan’s workers, as some examples detailed in Table 3.1 indicate.

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<sup>24</sup> MLHS, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> CAEL and NCHEMS, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Michigan Adult Education Reporting System (MAERS).

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2006. Microdata complied by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

<sup>28</sup> Michigan League for Human Services. *Labor Day Report*. 2008. Referencing Population Reference Bureau analysis of American Community Survey data, as requested by the Working Poor Families Project.

<sup>29</sup> Economic Policy Institute. *The State of Working America 2006/2007*. 2007.

<b>Table 3.1 - Median Annual Earnings for Middle-Skill Jobs</b>		
<b>Examples of High-Demand Middle-Skill Jobs in Michigan</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>2006 Median Annual Earnings*</b>
Registered Nurses	Healthcare	\$57,800
Truck Drivers, Heavy and Tractor-Trailer	Trucking	\$37,200
General Maintenance and Repair Workers	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	\$36,600
Carpenters	Construction	\$39,600
Automotive Mechanics	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	\$38,200
* 2006 median annual earnings for all occupations in Michigan = \$32,989		
Source: Skills2Compete (n.d.) <i>Michigan's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs</i> . Retrieved August 11, 2008 from <a href="http://www.skills2compete.org">www.skills2compete.org</a>		

Having a workforce that is prepared with the skills that are high in demand not only increases state revenues and personal spending but can attract new business into the state and ensure the state can thrive in the new economy.<sup>30</sup>

New businesses are drawn to Michigan when they are able to benefit from a highly-skilled talent pool. **For instance, access to skilled workers is cited as one of the defining factors in medical research firm Asterland's decision to relocate from England to Detroit's TechTown.** Stories like this are becoming more common throughout Michigan.<sup>31</sup>

In another example, Michigan's strong manufacturing and agricultural industries, as well as vast natural resources, are providing unprecedented opportunities for Green Job creation. The Governor's recently-announced Green Jobs Initiative – a \$6 million investment in training for jobs in alternative energy industries including wind, solar, biofuels, geothermal and other green industries – will include partnerships among community colleges, universities, adult learning programs, entrepreneurs and employers to create the training programs employers need to help make sure the emerging industries and green economy have the trained workers they need to grow and prosper.<sup>32</sup> These jobs represent unprecedented opportunities for workers in transition.

Transitions like these are taking place all around our state. We must harness the potential of these transitions and take action to improve the state's global competitiveness, employers' prosperity, and workers' abilities to succeed in the new economy. We have an unprecedented opportunity to make adult learning and workforce development efforts part-and-parcel of Michigan's economic development strategies. There is a great momentum to further integrate these efforts across multiple funding sources and organizations and to use policy and practice to aim Michigan toward being a leader in lifelong learning and economic prosperity. We have no other choice.

<sup>30</sup> MLHS, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Michigan Economic Development Corporation (2008). *Success Story: Asterland*. Retrieved on August 11, 2008 from [www.michiganadvantage.org](http://www.michiganadvantage.org)

<sup>32</sup> Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth (2008). *The Green Jobs Initiative*. Retrieved on August 11, 2008 from [www.michigan.gov/greenjobs](http://www.michigan.gov/greenjobs)

## 4. Vast Transformation is Imperative

The strategic intent of our efforts is clear:

### **STRATEGIC INTENT**

**One out of three Michigan workers lacks the basic skills or credentials to attain family-sustaining jobs and contribute to the state's economy.<sup>33</sup> If we do not address this crisis, our state's ability to prosper in the future will be severely hampered. It is imperative to transform Michigan's adult learning infrastructure to connect these adults to continuing education, hard and soft skills, and careers in our ever-changing economy.**

Today, Michigan's adult learning infrastructure is largely based on antiquated paradigms, outdated credentials, and poor connections to the needs of the broader economy. Principally, earning a high-school diploma or GED, once considered the terminal goal of adult learning efforts, is only one milestone for preparing learners to engage in lifelong learning and participate in our state's changing economy. **Engaging in post-secondary education is vital to being able to participate in this new economic environment.**

Additionally, financial resources for adult learning are far scarcer than was the case just a few years ago, forcing new approaches to be developed.

**The scale of the transformation needed is massive.** Transforming the current paradigm is crucial, so that going forward:

- Learners better retain and apply education to real-life settings, especially the workplace, aiding in faster progression toward their goals and their abilities to catalyze and benefit from their employers' transitions to emerging business models and markets.
- Providers of basic skills development, existing and new, use entrepreneurship to respond to decreasing funding and increasing demand.
- Learners have increased access to, participation in, and success at making transitions by accessing a range of innovative program models that support their individual lifelong learning needs and circumstances.
- Learners have access to programs that prepare them for careers in emerging markets and connect them to job opportunities that relate to their educational efforts.
- Michigan uses creativity and alignment to leverage transitions and maximally benefit from them.
- Michigan's adult learning infrastructure relies on data to make decisions about strategies and programming.

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, op.cit.

We all have a role to play in this transformation. Adult learning providers must work together and be innovative in their approaches to basic skills development, employers must support current workers in attaining basic skills that are needed for successful employment, community colleges must integrate basic skills development with continuing academic and occupational training, and policymakers must convey a sense of urgency to stakeholders and catalyze efforts to imaginatively address the issues we face today. This is not about a single existing system that has failed; rather, it is about a world of changing paradigms that demand new responses from all of us.

We are in the midst of a unique moment when multiple constituencies and stakeholders are supportive of extensive transformation. During well attended regional forums conducted by this Work Group, we heard practitioners across Michigan who understand the scale of change needed and are eager to be part of making it a reality. We must harness this current interest in adult learning policy and practice to put Michigan on the road to being a national proponent of lifelong learning and economic prosperity. To do this, Michigan's adult learning programs and policies must demonstrate several key principles, defined below, which together represent the vital sweeping reinvention of our adult learning infrastructure and its potential impact.

We see examples of each of these principles in action in various communities across Michigan and nationally where transformation is happening in relative isolation. We need to make these approaches more systemic so that they move from being exceptional to being commonplace. These programs are identified here, as they pertain to and illustrate the broader vision for transformation.

## **COLLABORATION**

**Michigan's policies and programs must:**

- **Synergistically unite the core competencies and capacities of various stakeholders to achieve a common vision of success for adult learners and employers.**

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Coordinating adult learning, workforce development, and business services efforts to create comprehensive lifelong learning programs.
- Creating networks of providers that offer seamless pathways that can meet widely different starting points and needs among the full range of adult learners.
- Expecting collaboration among a range of stakeholders, including employers, in program design and delivery.
- Identifying a common vision of success for adult learners and employers.

As an example, **The Michigan Works! Service Centers in Northwest Michigan** have truly become one-stop shops for clients seeking lifelong learning opportunities, with basic skills learning labs at each center. Michigan Works! and other agencies in that region deliver adult education services to adult learners through a multitude of partnerships. An adult education coordinator manages the partnerships and ensures that there are seamless transitions for adult learners. In fact, often the adult learners do not even know they are receiving services from separate agencies. The partners have cross-walked their assessments and funding strategies to eliminate program labels and program boundaries for adult learners – all program and funding eligibility is handled behind the scenes. Central to the region's success are "communication, collaboration and cooperation."

On another front, **Novi Community School District** has fostered a relationship with local hospitals (Providence, Beaumont, Botsford, and Henry Ford) to create a healthcare pathway for adult learners. Students are able to dual enroll in Oakland Community College and Novi Adult Basic Education to acquire basic skills in the context of studying healthcare related fields.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must require collaboration as a key element of all programs and policies to create essential synergies in an environment of decreasing resources.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

**Michigan's policies and programs must:**

- **Comprehensively promote shared responsibility for common outcomes across the adult learning infrastructure.**
- **Sufficiently invest in the strategies necessary to collect data on program performance.**
- **Use data to inform decisions about future policies and programs.**

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Developing shared outcome measures that quantify progress among aligned programs toward common goals.
- Collecting common information on learner characteristics and longitudinal data on learner outcomes to measure long-term success and promote lifelong engagement with learning.
- Regularly evaluate key large-scale data metrics to determine program performance and areas of opportunity.

As an example, **Florida's K-20 Education Data Warehouse** extracts data from multiple sources and provides a single repository of data concerning student services in the K-20 public education system. Operated and maintained by the Florida Department of Education, the data warehouse allows for longitudinal analysis and includes information on demographic characteristics, educational attainment history, and programming information, as well as employment information. Elements of the data are frequently used to evaluate the effectiveness of particular program models and make decisions on future strategies.

Additionally, **Washington State** used workforce, demographic, and economic data to determine what efforts would be necessary to address the urgent needs of adult learners in their state. Using this data, focus areas for strategic programming were identified and have provided a baseline against which to measure the success of implemented programs.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must take the lead on updating the State's existing data infrastructure to monitor program performance and learner outcomes across funding streams and agencies, and to make strategic data-driven decisions, so as to ensure that Michigan can be maximally responsive in the design of future policies and programs.

## RESPONSIVENESS

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Recognize that earning a high-school diploma is no longer sufficient for adult learners and employers; promote post-secondary education as the new standard for adult learners, understanding that attaining a high-school diploma or GED is an important milestone along the path of lifelong learning.
- Eagerly welcome learners at all levels with open doors and clear learning pathways.
- Seamlessly integrate program pathways and assist with navigation to move learners toward their goals.
- Develop programs that meet the needs of adult learners with non-traditional adult learning approaches, including accelerated curricula, flexible scheduling, contextualized remediation, and year-round programming.
- Inclusively engage employers as partners in developing adult learning standards and approaches.
- Ensure adult learners have access to opportunities, both by making programs affordable and available to learners, as well as by providing programs that meet learners where they are.

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Making individualization, customization, and non-traditional delivery methods, accelerated pacing, and creative curricula the norm in terms of adult learning programs and policies.
- Identifying pathways for adult learners at all levels that clearly outline how programs work in succession to move learners toward their goals and offer advising and navigating support to adult learners who are accessing these pathways.
- Partnering with employers to determine how adult learning efforts can best meet their needs and including them in program delivery and evaluation.
- Providing a range of supportive services and resources that enhance learners' experiences and ease the barriers that prevent their participation and success, including financial barriers, among others.

As an example, **Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC)** has had tremendous success with CAP, the Career Advancement Program, a partnership between Michigan Works! and GRCC which offers an accelerated schedule of developmental college courses in a cohort group format. CAP is designed for displaced workers who have lost their jobs due to the impact of foreign trade. These students were highly paid, skilled manufacturing workers with a long and successful employment history. They find themselves with few options for manufacturing positions and few skills for non-manufacturing jobs. With the guidance of their Michigan Works! representative, they enroll in CAP to get themselves ready for their next career steps. CAP provides instruction and training in reading, writing, mathematics, computers and adjustment to college. Through the work of the semester, students experience a transformation of identity from factory worker to lifelong learner.

In another example, **Macomb Community College** committed resources and worked with area employers and the Macomb/St. Clair Workforce Development Board to create an entry-level program with unique features that would address the needs of healthcare employers, who needed to fill 1,500 new Certified Nursing Assistants positions, and the needs of unemployed, dislocated and underemployed workers. The program's curriculum addresses the needs of adult learners by combining classroom learning with hands-on laboratory practice and



supervised clinical training in a long-term care facility. The classes are scheduled during times when students are available and child care and other support is also being provided. Students also are able to use all of the College's resources such as free tutoring, time and personal management support, and counseling. Students also have access to a dedicated Macomb program manager who works with Michigan Works!, the Department of Human Services and other support services to address student's very real needs for child care, transportation, living expenses, etc. When students satisfactorily complete the nurse assistant training, they receive a certificate of completion and are eligible to take the Michigan Nurse Aide Competency Evaluation Test, which is required to receive the Certified Nurse Assistant designation. Certified students are qualified not only to get and keep an entry-level position in the growing healthcare field, but also to articulate that training to other career programs for future possible career advancement.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must aggregate employer demand to determine potential partnerships; connect employers with local adult learning system partners; and coordinate services that support learners as they pursue their goals.

## **AGILITY**

**Michigan's policies and programs must:**

- **Rapidly respond to the needs of learners, employers, and communities.**
- **Proactively identify new opportunities to meet diverse needs.**
- **Creatively design and deliver innovative programs that equip Michigan to be successful in emerging markets.**

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Listening to and analyzing the needs of learners, employers, and communities to determine what efforts are needed to prepare them to participate in emerging markets.
- Partnering with a range of stakeholders to identify and act on new opportunities for Michigan's learners and employers.
- Identifying key transitions and encouraging creativity in program design and delivery that responds to these transitions.

As an example, **the Education and Training Connection (ETC) in Midland** is now offering courses to prepare those interested for careers in the filmmaking industry in response to recent efforts to make Michigan more attractive to filmmakers. The first class is a two-week, 60-hour course about filmmaking fundamentals, including set etiquette, language and the basics of being a production assistant, and how to create a résumé and find a job. The ETC program also will work with its students to help them find filmmaking jobs. The program will expand to specialized classes that will teach other aspects of filmmaking, including wardrobe, production designer, and hair and makeup. The filmmaking industry also can offer new opportunities for carpenters, electricians, lighting technicians, and other skilled tradespeople.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must work to stimulate and support agile responses to meet the needs of new and evolving industries in Michigan.

## CONTEXTUALIZATION

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Inventively develop learners' basic skills in the context of practical applications in the real world so they quickly grasp the relevance of the skills and remain engaged in programs until they earn needed credentials.
- Creatively develop basic skills in the context of occupational skills necessary for success at work.

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Creating and marketing programs that use non-traditional curriculum and settings to convey information contextually to workers seeking additional knowledge and skills so that the connections between life, learning, and work are transparent to learners.
- Working with employers to determine the skills and knowledge required for specific occupations and integrating these requirements into basic education curriculum.
- Identifying and bringing to scale curricula that best convey knowledge and skills to adult learners in the context of life and work.

As an example, **Mott Community College's Workforce Education Center (MCC)** has developed career pathways for students through its involvement with the national Breaking Through Initiative. MCC ensures that programs have strong connections to the labor market by reviewing several dimensions of labor market information, reviewing postings sent to the College from area employers, and soliciting regular feedback from employers via the College's job developers and corporate services representatives. The resulting career pathway programs are seamless to students in that each phase builds upon the skills, credentials, and/or certificates earned in the previous phase, from basic skills attainment to technical certifications. There are multiple points of entry and exit for students. MCC also accelerates basic skills attainment in phase one, and has some accelerated vocational options within the pathways. Currently, there are pathways available to students in Healthcare, Business Management, Engineering/Manufacturing/Industrial Technologies, and Human Services and Public Administration. MCC also provides supports to students by registering all pathways students in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services, to allow access to social supports like transportation and child care, and training funds like No Worker Left Behind. Additionally, academic supports like academic advising and tutoring are provided by the college.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must incorporate contextualization as a necessary element of adult learning pedagogy to ensure the success of learners.

## ENTREPRENEURISM

Michigan's policies and programs must:

- Continuously employ innovative thinking and approaches in program delivery that increase the range of customers served by programs.
- Resourcefully leverage various assets to support new approaches and outcomes for learners, employers, and the state.
- Foster entrepreneurial thinking and process so learners enter the workplace or start their own businesses equipped to sustain the entrepreneurial spirit that drives the innovation of new products, processes, and job creation.

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Identifying innovative program approaches to meet various the needs of various customers, including employers, occurring at the state and national levels and bringing these efforts to scale.
- Increasing the flexibility of funding streams to make it possible to combine resources in support of innovative program delivery.
- Facilitating conversations among various stakeholders to catalyze inventive thinking.

As an example, **Literacy Center of West Michigan** found that a number of employers in their area needed help in increasing the literacy and English language skills of their workforces. The Center began offering 10- to 12-week classes on-site at the companies for a fee to the company or through a combination of fees and grant funding. The program is customized to each employer based on a thorough needs assessment of the company. Customization options at three levels are offered to the company. In addition to specialized lessons, the reading and writing portions of the curriculum use real company documents or the work language that is specific to the company as study materials. Curriculum is in the context of employees' jobs, providing English or literacy skill instruction and work place training simultaneously. The Center has had demonstrated success with the employers served thus far and is continuing to build connections with employers and communicate with them on the need for investment in their human capital. The Center also uses creative funding to support the project, including a variety of public and private funds.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must build system capacity to be entrepreneurial, to include supporting adult learning providers as they are required to develop innovative programs to produce more marketable programs and to incorporate entrepreneurial thinking in their instructional models for learners. Entrepreneurial spirit is what made America a world leader.

## **ALIGNMENT**

**Michigan's policies and programs must:**

- **Intentionally develop articulation agreements and standardized pathways among various institutions to ensure adult learners can participate in lifelong learning knowing that their academic work will be recognized across various institutions and employers.**
- **Strategically align funding to support a comprehensive strategy and approaches that meet the needs of adult learners, employers, and the state.**

At a minimum, Michigan must focus on:

- Coordinating funding streams so that the adult learning infrastructure can meet the needs of students and employers with non-traditional programs.
- Increasing articulation agreements between education providers to ensure that program requirements are aligned with one another and that students can make seamless transitions from one institution to the next as they continue their lifelong learning efforts.
- Developing a common definition of remedial education and make clear its role in the pathways for students pursuing post-secondary learning.
- Preparing future high-school graduates to continue on successfully to post-secondary programs.

As an example, **L'Anse Creuse Public Schools** has a program partnering with their local Michigan Works! Agency, the Macomb Computer Center, Macomb Community College, and Baker College to enable students to transfer credit from their adult basic education program to the community colleges. Macomb Community College and Baker College have articulation agreements with L'Anse Creuse whereby students can earn up to 17 credits. Specifically, students are able to participate in a workforce readiness skills course which transfers as two credits at Macomb Community College in the Career and Technical Education program.

The Department of Labor and Economic Growth must realign existing sources supporting adult learning activities toward a common vision for adult learners and employers and must catalyze and support alignment of educational programs across the state to ensure that program and policies are part of an aligned strategy.

**Michigan's transformed infrastructure -- demonstrating agility, contextualization, entrepreneurialism, responsiveness, collaboration, alignment, and accountability -- promises to deliver a number of benefits to learners, employers, communities, and the state.**

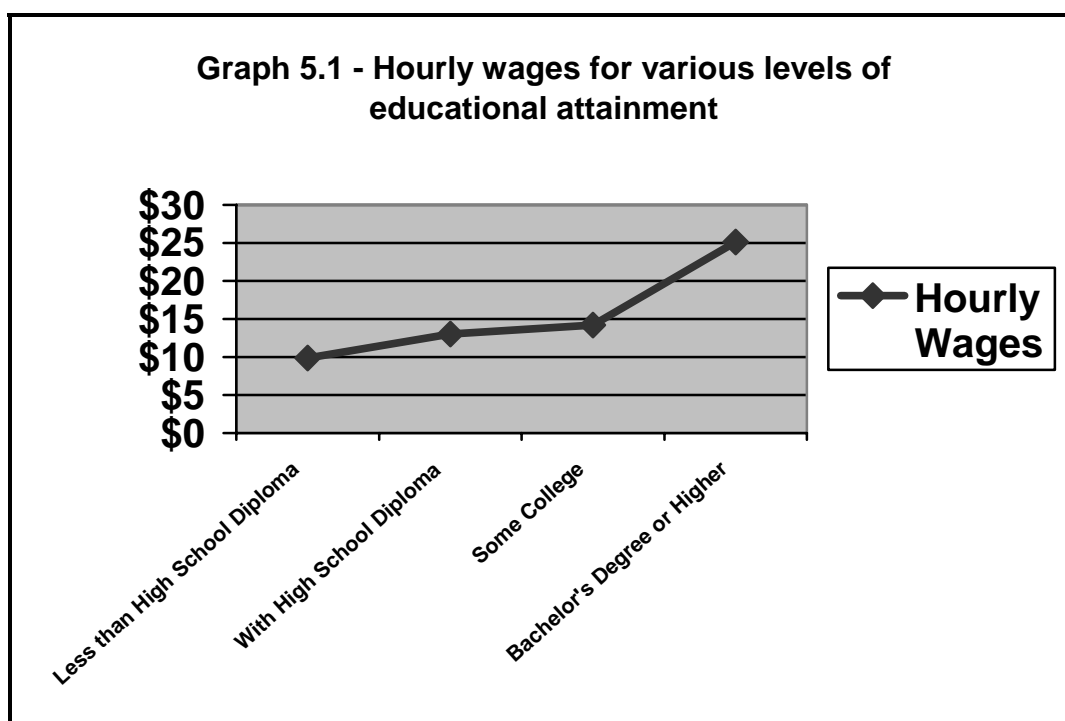
## 5. The Impact of Transformation

The impact of a transformed adult learning infrastructure on workers, employers, and our state will be profound and widespread.

### Higher personal incomes

Increased educational achievement typically results in increased wages for workers. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over an adult's working life, high-school graduates earn an average of \$1.4 million, while Associate's Degree holders earn about \$1.6 million and Bachelor's degree holders earn about \$1.8 million over their lifetimes.<sup>34</sup>

Graph 5.1 below demonstrates the increase in wages that can result from earning a High School Diploma and continuing with lifelong learning.<sup>35</sup>

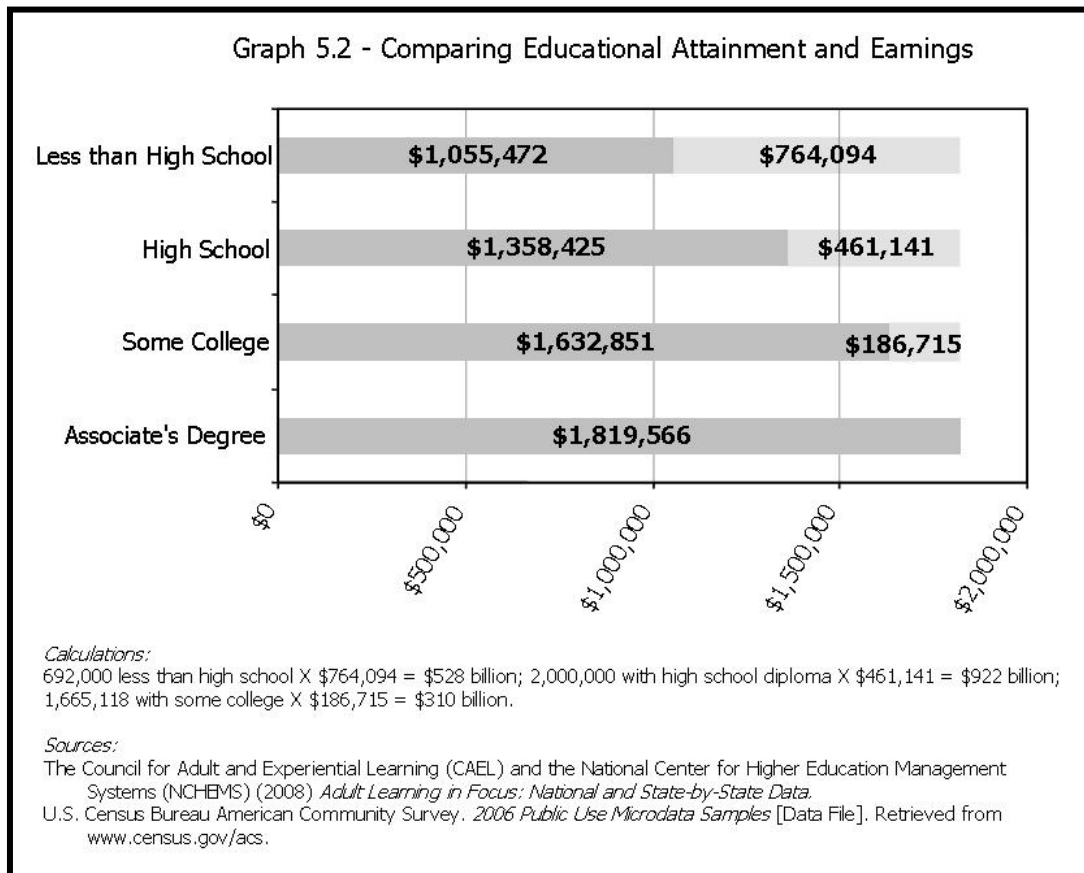


As shown in Graph 5.2, over a lifetime, increased education for Michigan's workers offers astounding financial benefits for our state. If those adults in Michigan with less than a high-school diploma, with a high-school diploma, and with some college were to earn an Associate's Degree, their cumulative lifetime earnings would increase by \$1.76 trillion.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. 2006 *Public Use Microdata Samples* [Data File]. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/acs](http://www.census.gov/acs).

<sup>35</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Reports, 2007. Microdata compiled by the Economic Policy Institute.

Furthermore, education is critical to ensuring workers can continue to work and earn wages during periods of high unemployment. The unemployment rate for workers without a high school diploma tends to jump disproportionately high during uncertain economic times. Those with a diploma, but no post-secondary training also experience significant jumps. However, the unemployment rates of workers with some college and especially with four-year degrees are much more level during time of economic downturn.<sup>36</sup>



## Higher rates of citizenship and civic engagement

There is a strong correlation between levels of citizenship and civic engagement and levels of educational attainment. For example, 39.5 percent of registered voters with less than a high-school diploma voted in the 2004 Presidential elections, as compared to 68.9 percent of registered voters with at least some college or an Associate's Degree.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, workers who are better educated and better paid are more likely to engage in their communities as critical drivers of economic vitality at both the local and national levels<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Michigan League for Human Services. *Labor Day Report*. 2008. Referencing Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data.

<sup>37</sup> US Census Bureau. *Voting and Registration in the Election of 2004*. 2006. Retrieved on Aug. 20, 2008 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2006pubs/p20-556.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> National Commission on Adult Literacy, op cit.

## Higher levels of educational achievement for future generations

Perceptions about learning and standards for achievement are transmitted from parents to children, playing a significant role in determining the levels of education children will pursue. Parents who have had affirming learning experiences and have benefited from continuing education will pass these positive messages to their children; thus, increasing the likelihood that children will pursue continuing education. The number one predictor of a child's success in school is the literacy level of the guardian parent, usually the mother.

Additionally, increasing family income increases the chances that a student will access post-secondary education. Family income is a major predictor for whether a student will be lost in the educational pipeline. Research has shown a significant gap in readiness for Kindergarten based on low family income. The Education Commission of the States estimates that while the rate of ninth graders entering college right after high school is around 39.5 percent, it is only 23.3 percent for Michigan's low-income students.<sup>39</sup>

## Higher levels of fiscal contribution

A policy paper written by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University for the National Commission on Adult Literacy reveals the substantial fiscal burden that residents lacking high-school diplomas impose on individual states. Fiscal contribution estimates for Michigan are cited in the report:

*In Michigan, the average high-school graduate paid \$4,122 more in taxes in 2004-2005 than he or she received in cash and in-kind transfers from the government (each graduate paid \$1.89 in taxes for every \$1.00 he or she received in government benefits). Individuals with some college education, including an associate's degree paid \$8,917 more than they received (a ratio of \$3.74 to every \$1.00). In contrast, the average Michigan adult with less than a high-school diploma paid \$3,488 dollars less in taxes than he or she received in benefits that year (these adults only paid \$0.64 in taxes for every \$1.00 they received).<sup>40</sup>*

According to these calculations, if the approximately 692,000 working-age adults we have identified as not having a high-school diploma were to earn a diploma or GED, their annual net fiscal contribution would increase by \$4.97 billion. If they went on to college, their annual net fiscal contribution would increase by another \$3.13 billion. Clearly, increased investment in educational achievement yields financial benefits for the state and the nation.

## Higher rates of job creation and economic growth

Employers are seeing opportunities in markets that are emerging within the new economy. Michigan will be able to attract employers who strongly value a workforce that has the skills, knowledge, and credentials required to meet their needs. A skilled workforce attracts higher-end employers and provides the vital human capital necessary for existing employers to expand more rapidly. When we meet the expansion of opportunities in the new economy with an equal or greater increase in the number of workers who have the appropriate training for these occupations and careers, we can expect job creation and economic growth.

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<sup>39</sup> MLHS, op cit.

<sup>40</sup> National Commission on Adult Literacy, op.cit.

## 6. Conclusion

To ensure our state prospers in the changing economy, we have no other option but to drastically reinvent Michigan's adult learning infrastructure. The implications of inaction are clear, as are the benefits.

It is imperative that we use this unprecedented opportunity to address the crisis that is affecting one in three of our workers and having a tremendous impact on our state. Our new approaches must reflect the values of our changing economy: agility, contextualization, entrepreneurialism, responsiveness, collaboration, alignment, and accountability.

Working together we can aim Michigan toward being a leader in lifelong learning and economic prosperity. We can harness the potential of the transitions taking place around us to improve our state's global competitiveness, employers' prosperity, and workers' abilities to succeed in the ever-changing economy.

**The time for change is now.**

*Staff support for the Low-Wage Worker Advancement Committee and Adult Learning Work Group is being provided by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan League for Human Services, and Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, with grant support from the Joyce and Mott Foundations.*



## 7. Appendices

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**Final Report**  
**Michigan Council for Labor and Economic Growth**  
**Adult Learning Work Group**  
**2008 Regional Forums**

## **Introduction**

Local leaders in adult learning policy and practice across Michigan see an urgent need to reframe and reinvent the state's approach to increasing basic skills held by adult workers. At the same time, incredibly innovative partnerships are emerging that serve as examples of the dramatic scale of transformation that is needed, and leaders can readily be found who are committed to being part of a major, sustained commitment to basic skills improvement.

These themes were heard by state officials repeatedly during the course of holding seven regional forums this summer. More than 200 leaders participated in those forums, spanning employers, adult educators, literacy councils, community colleges, universities, Michigan Works! Agencies, community organizations, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

The regional forums were part of the research being done by the Council for Labor and Economic Growth's Adult Learning Work Group, which was charged with developing a set of policy and program recommendations about Michigan's next generation adult learning strategy as part of the work plan of its parent Low Wage Worker Advancement Committee. The Work Group's policy framework is being considered at the September 9, 2008 meeting of the Council for Labor and Economic Growth, to be followed in December by more specific actions proposed for implementation.

The framework being considered was influenced enormously by the feedback received during the regional forums. Every major recommendation being made was proposed in one or more (often several) of the forums.

The Adult Learning Work Group is comprised of adult education practitioners and administrators, literacy councils, community college administrators, university leaders, representatives of statewide adult and community college associations, four state departments (Labor and Economic Growth, Human Services, Corrections, and Education), area foundations, and local and statewide community-based organizations. The regional forums were one important dimension of the Work Group's research and deliberations, and were held to gain a better understanding of the current state of play in the development of basic skills in Michigan and the opportunities and challenges ahead,

The members of the Adult Learning Work Group would like to thank everyone who participated in the regional forums for their enthusiasm and insights into the potential future of adult learning in Michigan. The response to the forums was overwhelmingly positive; the forums were energetic, informative, and eye-opening. The energy reflected the unique opportunity and readiness across the state for an adult learning strategy that is sufficiently creative, flexible, integrated and accountable to meet the needs of Michigan's changing economy.

At each forum, the Work Group heard from two panels – a local exemplary program panel and a panel discussion featuring local leaders in adult education. Based on those discussions, participants were asked to share their individual ideas, concerns and advice in reinventing

Michigan's adult learning infrastructure. That advice was captured and is reflected in this report.

We heard a variety of exemplary practices from programs throughout the state, along with creative ideas and perspectives on the challenges and opportunities facing our current adult learning system. We are excited by the innovation we already see in pockets around the state, and by the willingness of many dedicated educators to come together in creating new, diverse solutions that better fit a range of needs today and in the future.

On September 9<sup>th</sup>, the Work Group will present its findings and recommendations to Michigan's Council for Labor and Economic Growth. All forum attendees will be sent a copy of the report and we welcome your comments. Even more importantly, we ask that you commit to staying engaged with the reinvention of how Michigan develops basic skills. We will be soliciting your feedback during the rest of 2008 as the Council moves to turn bold strategic intent and guiding principles into implementation strategies for transformation that practitioners can move to action immediately thereafter.

One key definitional point: the Work Group deliberately is using the term "adult learning" to describe its area of focus in order to ensure that the framework reflects both the full scale of the enormous need for basic skills improvement and embraces within it every type of organization that helps to fulfill those needs. This problem and its solutions don't fit neatly into any one agency or program; what we heard in the Forums reflects the Work Group's bias that our strategy requires a myriad of creative partnerships.

### **General Observations of Issues Impacting Practitioners**

**The need for basic skills improvement is growing** - In each region, practitioners told us that the number of adults needing to improve their basic skills is increasing. The adult learner can be someone who dropped out of high school, someone who has recently lost a job or someone who generally needs to improve their skills. While programs are trying to keep up, the growth in need is outpacing their capacity to serve adult learners. Many program administrators noted that they often surpass the state's cap on funded participants. Unfortunately, this trend is not isolated to individual regions. Practitioners told us that "often this is thought of as an urban issue, but in rural areas we only have a 50 percent high school completion rate for adults."

Not only is the need growing, but the "typical" adult learner is no longer typical. Often programs are attracting younger adults who are realizing sooner than in the past that they need higher education. Furthermore, community colleges are seeing increasing numbers of students with high-school diplomas or GEDs needing developmental coursework before beginning college-level classes. Administrators indicated that at least 60 percent of students entering Community Colleges require at least one developmental course in reading, writing and/or mathematics.

We heard many variations of a common theme throughout the forums – **the goal of adult education should be to improve adults' basic skills and to help them reach self-sufficiency.** Often adult learners enter programs with the goals of improving their income, and being better able to provide support and guidance for their families. Programs should be designed to meet "students where they are" and "ensure that programs always benefit the learner." Adult

education should help adult learners access training, meet their personal goals and connect learners to good paying careers in the labor market.

## **Programming Improvements**

### **Adult learners often need intensive services to support them as they face personal challenges**

– Returning to school is a challenge for most adults. Often they have multiple responsibilities, low wages and are unaware of where to go for help and how to maneuver through the system. In order to succeed in basic skills programs, adult learners need programs that recognize their individual challenges and connect them to resources to mitigate those challenges. For example, child care and transportation were named as very common issues for adult learners. While most programs try to provide these supports, we heard that it is often difficult to provide the level of support adult learners need and many programs, especially in rural areas, have difficulty accessing these wrap-around services.

**Adult learners often need help in navigating career and educational pathways** -- Practitioners told us that often adult learners are unaware of the career opportunities and the pathways to reach those opportunities. We heard that students need “navigators” to provide the mentoring and coaching required to effectively move through various systems. One individual stated, “We need support for students to complete the FAFSA and [college] applications at adult education programs.” Moreover, many stated that adult learners would greatly benefit from having intensive career and postsecondary advising.

A number of people argued that support for learners in adult education programs is just the beginning. Once placed into employment adults should be able to access support to help them advance in their careers and continue to improve their skills. In addition, adult learners should be equipped with the skills to advocate for themselves by “build[ing] self-advocacy into programs.”

### **Programs should accommodate adult learners’ highly varied schedules, challenges and skills**

– Adult learners have many diverse responsibilities, including work schedules and families. We heard that programs that are most effective have flexible times and locations to accommodate the unique schedules of the non-traditional learner. Often we were told of programs that are operated during the evenings and weekends or that are taught online, enabling learners to schedule their own coursework. Additionally, practitioners noted that many adult learners have immediate needs for education and cannot wait until the next semester to enroll in a program – “there should be more points of entry and year-round open enrollment programs.”

In many regions we heard that adult learners have a wide range of skills and individual challenges to learning. Overwhelmingly, we were told that programs needed to be responsive to the multiple skill levels of adults and create environments that build relationships amongst learners and practitioners. A number of practitioners stated that the field needs to learn how to deal with learning disabilities and differences and teach to unique skill levels. We heard that many adult learners have been told “they can’t learn” and need to have an environment that builds their confidence and empowers them to engage with the material. One practitioner stated that “individuals should be recognized and rewarded for the small steps.” Finally, many programs illustrated that creating a sense of community helped their adult learners work together to overcome their challenges.

**Adult learners need the opportunity to learn relevant skills in nontraditional environments –**

In each region we heard that adult learners have immediate and career related educational needs. They do not have the time to complete multiple degree programs before seeing economic rewards for their efforts. A number of practitioners suggested that adult learners could benefit from programs that offer contextualized learning, accelerating the educational pathway to careers – “basic skills should be integrated into occupational training.” Furthermore, many suggested that soft-skill training should be embedded in coursework to not only prepare adults academically, but socially.

Often forum participants said that adult learners were discouraged in their first educational experiences and were unwilling to return to those environments. Many argued that non-traditional learning environments were more inviting and accepting of adult learners and facilitated better learning outcomes. One region specifically noted that they try to house programs in non-school atmospheres, often simulating a workplace environment. Others suggested that apprenticeships and internships offer opportunities to learn in and experience non-traditional educational environments.

**System Improvements**

**Programs should be aligned, collaborative and integrated –** At each regional forum, collaboration was identified as a key component of successful adult learning programs. Forum participants often told us that adult learners are required to complete multiple assessments, visit multiple agencies and often have difficulty accessing all the services they need because of eligibility and funding constraints. A common theme was that the adult learning system should foster partnerships between local and regional organizations through common assessments, aligned curricula and blended funding streams. We heard, “there should be alignment between adult education and college entrance requirements” and “shared visions between organizations.” In some areas we were told that the system should foster regionalism and in others we were told that there should be local input and control.

Increased collaboration amongst stakeholder groups and agencies was mentioned at each forum. Often participants cited employers, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan Works! Agencies, Michigan Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Corrections, community colleges and adult education providers as examples of agencies that need to be active partners in the adult learning system. Suggestions for how to foster such collaboration included, “tie funding to partnerships,” “create a database of providers,” “give business a decision-making role,” “enable learning disability funding to follow students from the K-12 system to the adult education system” and “create dual-enrollment programs for adult learners.”

Additionally, collaboration was mentioned as a key vehicle for increasing the system’s ability to rapidly respond to the needs of learners, employers, and communities, as most noted that it would take various stakeholders to address the needs of these customers. Furthermore, we heard about the need to leverage resources among various stakeholders, including adult education providers, Michigan Works! Agencies, employers, Community Colleges and the like to support new models and approaches to meet new and increasing customer needs.

**Adult learners often fall through the gaps in transitions –** We often heard that there are large gaps between programs and agencies into which adult learners fall during transitions. For

example, there were many accounts of adult learners graduating from GED programs but not successfully transitioning to post-secondary education or training. Over and over, forum participants stated that the adult learning system needs to allow for seamless transitions and be responsive to the needs of adult learners and a changing economy. Many participants told us that requirements should be aligned and counselors should help adult learners make transitions. Moreover, we heard that the adult learning system should be connecting employer and community needs to aid smooth transitions. One participant said, “We need the employer perspective on the local level. By the time the state catches up to employer needs, the employers have moved on.” In order to create a system that is agile and addresses learner needs, employers and other stakeholders need to aid in creating a responsive and seamless system.

**Little is known about what happens to adult learners after completing a program** – Many practitioners spoke of their frustrations with not knowing what happens to their program participants after they leave programs. We heard, “there is no common data system, so we can’t track students from when a GED was attained to where they are now.” Without a common tracking system, many practitioners said they were unable to determine when and where adult learners dropped out of the system and how to reconnect with those individuals: “We need to reach out to students who dropped out through referrals and a tracking system for these students.” Furthermore, they expressed frustration with not being able to know accurately how many of their students went on to postsecondary education and training or improved their job prospects.

### **Cultural Improvements**

**Lifelong learning should become the expectation, not the exception** – Throughout the state, many told us that basic skills and continual learning are becoming necessities in a changing labor market. A GED is no longer enough to earn family sustaining wages. Forum participants had many ideas about how to create an expectation of lifelong learning, including common adult learning branding, and messaging campaigns. We heard that there were key groups that needed to support lifelong learning to create cultural shifts – “employer buy-in to the importance of lifelong learning is essential.” Additionally, many regions noted that post-secondary education can take many different forms including four-year degrees, two-year degrees and training certificates.

**Adult learning is often accompanied by a cultural stigma** – We heard many accounts of adult learners being stigmatized and reluctant to enter the adult learning system. Many stated that most students want high-school diplomas and higher education, but it is discouraging to return to a system of which they have negative perceptions. Overwhelmingly, forum participants told us that the adult learning system needs to work to remove the stigmas associated with adult learning and adult basic education.

*Staff support for the Adult Learning Work Group is being provided by the Department of Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan League for Human Services, and Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, with grant support from the Joyce and Mott Foundations.*

## **Appendices:**

### **Framing Questions for Adult Learning Forum Panel**

- What is the scale of the need for basic skills development in this region? Is the need growing or shrinking over time?
- What do you see as the goal or goals for current investments in basic skills development? What should those goals be going forward? (Examples: readiness for entering post secondary education; readiness for entry into career path jobs)
- What adult learning practices do you see going on that we should be expanding and replicating?
- Who are we reaching effectively with current approaches to basic skills development? Who are we missing?
- Should basic skills development be integrated with occupational training? Should we focus on developing skills within the context of the person's job?
- What is the readiness of schools and colleges to offer non traditional models, such as accelerated learning, contextual learning, modules smaller than a semester, etc.? Does Michigan need to embrace some or all of those models? Why or why not?
- We know funding for adult education has been cut in Michigan dramatically from past levels. Set that aside for a moment. If you could change three things in state policy and practice that would dramatically increase basic skills attainment, what would those changes be?

### **Framing Questions for Table Discussions**

- Given the goal to dramatically increase basic skills attainment among adults, what are the elements and characteristics that should be contained in Michigan's adult learning policy and funding priorities? You have a blank slate – what would make a major difference?
- How should we link the issue of basic skills shortfalls with the broader agenda for increased post secondary educational attainment in Michigan?
- What are concrete things that partners can collaborate on to improve lifelong learning opportunities for adults in your region?



## **Forum Presenters**

### **Detroit**

- Debra Porchia-Usher, United Way for Southeastern Michigan
- Jaffiria Leach-Orr, Detroit Public Schools
- Mary Jones, Wayne County Community College

### **Eastern Upper Penninsula**

- Kris Derusha, Tahquamenon Area Schools
- George Snider, Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians

### **Mid-Michigan**

- Lyn Knapp, Education Training Center
- Jeff McNeal, Education Training Center
- Mary Weise, Family Literacy Center

### **Northwest Michigan**

- Christy Nelson, Traverse Bay Area ISD
- Elaine Wood, NW MI Council of Governments
- Jean Peters, Healthcare RSA
- Annie Shelter, Kalkaska County RSA

### **Southeast Michigan**

- Bob Steeh, Novi Community School District
- Gregg Dionne, Hazel Park School District
- Michelle Irwin, L'Anse Creuse / Mount Clemens Adult Education
- Linda Casenhiser, Oakland Community College
- Niko Dawson, Oakland Community College

### **Southwest Michigan**

- Sid Mohn, The Opportunity Center
- Kim Thinnies, Kalamazoo Adult Education
- Scott Goodwin, Goodwill Industries

### **West Michigan**

- Vera Grishkina, Literacy Center of West Michigan
- Linda Krombeen, Literacy Center of West Michigan
- Carolyn Madden, Read Muskegon
- Courtney Schaub, Read Muskegon
- Curt Babcock, Whitehall Community Schools

## **Forum Panelists**

*Panels moderated by Andy Levin and Marcia Black-Watson, Department of Labor and Economic Growth*

### **Detroit**

- William Barber, Henry Ford Community College
- Susan Corey, SEMCA MIWorks!
- Erica Larkins, Focus: Hope
- Ray Metz, University of Michigan-Dearborn
- David Porter, retired, Detroit Public Schools

### **Eastern Upper Peninsula**

- Samantha Cameron, Bay Mills Community College
- William Sutter, Consolidated Community Schools
- Gwen Worley, Eastern UP MIWorks!

### **Mid-Michigan**

- George Barker, Mott Adult High School
- Robert Matthews, Mott Community College
- Katie Wolf, Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education

### **Northwest Michigan**

- Marguerite Cotto, NW MI College
- Mary Marois, Retired from Dept. of Human Services
- Jan Warren, NW MI Works!

### **Southeast Michigan**

- John Almstadt, Oakland County Workforce Development Division
- Niko Dawson, Oakland Community College
- Tracy S. Hall, Focus: HOPE
- Pam Kellett, Oakland University

### **Southwest Michigan**

- Jeannette Holton, Michigan Works! Berrien-Cass-Van Buren
- Rich Klemm, Niles Adult Education
- Anna Murphy, United Way of Southwest Michigan
- Chuck Philip, Lake Michigan College
- Chris Siebenmark, Legislative Aide to Senator Jelinek

### **West Michigan**

- Ashleigh Emmerson, West Michigan TEAM
- Chris Whittman, Orchard View Workforce Development
- Doug Wood, Orchard View Adult Education
- Eric Williams, Grand Rapids Community College

## **Adult Learning Work Group Members**

Andy Levin (Work Group Chair)  
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Michigan Department of Human Services

Ed Bagale  
University of Michigan – Dearborn

Lena Barkley  
CVS

Patty Cantu  
Michigan Department of Education

Julie DeRose  
Michigan Department of Corrections

Luann Dunsford  
Michigan Works! Association

Dianne Duthie  
Michigan Department of Labor & Economic  
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South Central Michigan Works!

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Dennis Hart  
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Michigan Department of Labor & Economic  
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Barry Kinsey  
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Susan Ledy  
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Gary Tweddle  
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Chris Van Heel  
Second Mile Education Services

William D. Wilson Jr.,  
Michigan Department of Corrections

Katie Wolf  
Michigan Association of Community and  
Adult Education

David Zuhlke  
Middle Cities Education Organization